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ABSTRACT

The use of paraprofessionals to fulfill the program planning functions of the college counseling office has proven effective at St. Petersburg Junior College (Clearwater Campus), Florida. Ideally, these paraprofessionals should be mature adults, have some college experience, and report to the same supervisor as do the counselors. They perform such clerical and administrative tasks as programming courses, scheduling students in classes, and assisting in the registration process. This allows the counseling staff more time for on-going developmental counseling. Experience to date has shown that counselors have been able to spend more time counseling students with difficulties and that the paraprofessional is more efficient than the faculty adviser in providing up-to-date program information. (J0)

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PARAPROFESSIONALS AT CLEARWATER CAMPUS

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To discuss the role of the paraprofessional at Clearwater Campus it will be necessary to describe briefly our counseling-advising program since the work of the paraprofessional and the counselor is so interwoven. Essentially, in this first part of the discussion I hope to make apparent the job description and objective served by the paraprofessional. Then, I want to make some specific statements concerning our situation and indicate some recommendations based on our experience there.

When the Clearwater Campus of St. Petersburg Junior College opened about four years ago, the staff included counselors and program planners; the title of the paraprofessional. It was our hope that by using paraprofessionals for certain clerical and administrative portions of the advising and scheduling process, we could allow counselors to better utilize their time more directly in the area of their professional competency, that is, to assist students with major concerns, planning a career, assessment of abilities, and assistance with personal problems.

Program planners were added to take care of most of the clerical aspects of scheduling or advising which traditionally had been a part of the counseling function. Such work included programming courses, scheduling students in classes and assisting in the registration process. In our situation we have attempted to make the work of counselors and program planners fit together to provide a broad base of service to the student. This philosophy is articulated by a two phase program called Career Planning Program. The first phase is counseling and the second, program planning.

Each new student at Clearwater Campus must see a counselor for an initial interview. The counselor and the student attempt to determine how realistic and confident the student is in his career objective. If the

student is unsure and undecided about his objective, the counselor and the student may continue with a second or a third interview to determine this goal. The counselor may use all of the familiar techniques including testing, information services, and appointments with people successful in careers of interest to the student as well as the discussion of high school records, placement examinations, interest inventories and personal preference tests.

Once the student has arrived at a realistic career choice, he is then referred to the program planner by means of a program planner's referral card. The referral card includes information such as academic major, future transfer institutions, level of placement, and a recommended hour load. The student then sees the program planner who, with this information provided on the referral card, assists the student to plan his academic schedule, make out pre-registration forms and further prepare for the actual registration process.

Now students may be referred to program planners on either a permanent or temporary basis. He is permanently referred if his objectives and goals are realistic. This means that he need not see a counselor each term. If the student has come to some conclusions as to immediate objectives but cannot arrive at a long range objective, the counselor may refer the student to program planning for one term. The student must then return to the counselor for further exploration prior to his next program planning session. If a student changes major or runs into academic or personal difficulty he is referred back to the counselor by the program planner. However, if the student does not encounter such difficulty he would continue to return to the program planner for academic planning each successive term. This is similar to the traditional Faculty Advisor role which we know.

The program planner can become an expert in course and curriculum articulation with the senior institutions, or within various departments for two-year programs. For example; he knows that a certain course in biology

is accepted at F. S. U. (Florida State University) while another is more acceptable at the University of South Florida. In addition, he can make certain that students follow the suggested curriculum and insure that the student meets the requirements for graduation.

In this kind of relationship counselor's workloads are relieved of the repeated task of program planning with well-oriented students. Students, however, are encouraged to seek out their counselor at any time there is a personal concern. The time saving may approximate 50 per cent, that is, he spends 50 per cent less time with clerical and mechanical duties. The process gives the counselor much-needed time to work with those students who are having the most difficulty, academically, as well as those many students with personal concerns. In short, counselors have more time for actual counseling.

At Clearwater we have six counselors with a counselor-student ratio of approximately 500 students to each counselor. There are four program planners. It must be remembered that they also serve as assistant to the registrar.

Let me give some examples of preliminary results which we have seen. In the fall of 1968 and the fall of 1969 the college enrolled approximately the same number of day students for both sessions, roughly 3,000.

In 1968, 58% of the students were required to return to the counselor before scheduling the next term. Forty-two per cent were referred to the program planners on a more permanent basis. In 1969, only 25% were required to return to the counselor, and 75%, approximately one-third fewer students, were required to see the counselor. While at the same time - appointments for counseling other than that which involved program planning increased from 35% of total contacts to 54% of total contacts. The counselor workloads were approximately the same for both sessions. These figures do not include the on-going counseling which is done on a day to day basis, nor do they

consider "Walk-ins". These contacts are reported to be much more frequent than when counselors were primarily involved in academic advising. What we see in these statistics is a division of workload between the counselor and a paraprofessional.

Now let me say some specific things about our program planner:

In our case he is not really a paraprofessional. We started out with people who have baccalaureate degrees. One now is close to a Masters Degree in Counseling. This level of academic preparation is not necessary and probably undesirable since specialist with this much training have difficulty adjusting to the more clerical aspects of program planning. In many ways they fashion themselves as counselors and, in some cases, even attempt to develop a counseling relationship with the student. My recommendation would be to hire mature adults with some college experience, perhaps an A.A. degree, in this paraprofessional role.

Our program planners are on the Professional Salary Schedule. This is not economical. I would recommend, if we did it again, to have program planners on the Supportive Salary Schedule.

In our situation these paraprofessionals report to a registrar while counselors are supervised by a Director of Counseling. The paraprofessional must report to the same supervisor as do the counselors. Probably a good ratio would be one paraprofessional for two counselors.

The program at Clearwater Campus is by no means perfected. But it is my firm conviction that paraprofessional under supervision of counselors can do a better job than Faculty Advisors and used in this manner greatly enrich the program of services to students. Counselors are released from clerical duties which make them more available for ongoing developmental counseling.